

Testimony of Mary Oster
SB 111 AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS.

Members of the Appropriations committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on SB 111. My name is Mary Oster and I live in Norwalk. I am the Early Childhood Coordinator for the City of Norwalk and a member of the Norwalk Early Childhood Council. I support SB 111 with the following provisions.

The child care sector is in crisis. We need workers now. Some child care businesses have closed, but many more have closed classrooms because they can't find staff. This puts them in danger of closing in the next few months. *Of the Norwalk programs who responded to a recent survey, five preschool classrooms are closed because programs cannot find teachers. Our directors have devoted every resource to finding qualified teachers to hire. With five classrooms closed at 20 children per classroom, that's 100 children not enrolled in preschool. Not receiving the education needed to enter kindergarten ready to learn means puts these children and families at a real disadvantage. If parents cannot find childcare, they cannot work. Or, they resort to an environment that may not be safe for their child.*

The ENTIRE system needs equitable support across all settings. There is no room to raise tuition for parents that can't afford early care and education now.

This means we need on-going, substantial wage supplements and benefits for small private centers, nonprofit centers (including religious programs) and family child care providers. This includes state funded and school readiness programs, which have not had a meaningful increase since 2015. They need to have reimbursement rates generously adjusted so that they are able to continue to provide high quality care and education.

Early care and education providers are in the brain-building business. By age 3 a child's brain has reached 80% of its adult size. Without the experiences and exposure to a high-quality early care and education experience, some children will be left behind.

Please treat Connecticut's system of early care and education as the essential service that it is.

We need increased funding now before more programs are forced to close their doors.

Thank-you
Mary Oster
Norwalk, CT